



Two days in DC



VISTA Patricia Rogers writes about her experience in the Inaugural Parade

VISTA Viewfinder
Issue 19:
January 28, 2009

VISTA: Volunteers In Service To America
Since 1964, 175,000 Strong



VISTA
viewfinder



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since 1964

2 Volunteers
in Service

3 175,000
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SNAPSHOTS

Below are some VISTA MLK Day stories we've heard about so far...

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Two days in DC

Matt Goodridge, an AmeriCorps VISTA at [DC SCORES](#), tells of his experience during two incredible days in our nation's capital.

MLK Day

Today I headed to Capitol Hill to volunteer at an elementary school. The volunteer project was organized by AmeriCorps for current volunteers and alumni. We spent the day cleaning up an alley behind the school, planting tulip bulbs in the beds around the trees, and constructing an outdoor classroom environment.

As we cleaned up the school, I talked to my fellow AmeriCorps members about their experiences. Everyone had a different story about how they became part of AmeriCorps, and what they had done, or were currently doing, in their service years. A common theme in every

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Win a VISTA hoodie.
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story was our sense of duty to serve in our communities.

This was the first time I had interacted on a project with fellow DC VISTAS outside of my own assignment. I had known that several other VISTAS were working in DC, and that many alumni still lived in the area, but knowing that was nothing compared to the pride that I felt working together. Another source of pride was knowing our president-elect was somewhere in this city volunteering with his family on MLK day, and that he had urged the nation to participate in a day of service. (Read President Obama's remarks [honoring Dr. King's legacy and serving America](#).)

On my way home I decided to walk by the Smithsonian Mall to see it before the big day tomorrow. I walked past the Capitol building and saw the massive set-up of chairs, speakers, jumbo-trons, and fences for the next day. The Mall was roiling with people, some taking pictures of the empty chairs and podium. As I looked across the Mall towards the Washington Monument, I tried to imagine what was in store for tomorrow.

Inauguration Day

I live in a hilly neighborhood about two miles north of the Mall. My friends and I decided to catch a bus as far as we could, then walk the rest of the way. After missing one bus packed with people, we were lucky enough to cram on to a second bus. As we headed into downtown DC, the crowds on the sidewalk grew from a small trickle to a steady stream. We got off the bus about 10 blocks from the entrance to the Mall area into a sea of pedestrians.

Surprisingly, getting to the Mall was relatively easy. By 9:15, we had staked out a spot in the shadow of the Washington Monument on the North side. The area around us was already packed with people, and one of my friends quipped "I am probably the 800,001st person between Obama and here". As it turned out, from a later Capitol police estimate, there was closer to one million people ahead of us in the 1.2 miles between the Capitol steps and the Washington Monument.

Although we had a prime view of one of the multiple jumbo-trons, being in the shadow of the monument proved fool-hardy in the freezing cold. For the next two hours until the start of inauguration, we huddled together, like emperor penguins, and watched a re-run Sunday's concert at the Lincoln Memorial. Eventually, the sun made an appearance from behind the monument to some relief.

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FAQ

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[Click here](#) to see the video.

Finally, the time came. Past-presidents, senators, and other elected officials entered the stage to varied cheers (and boos). The largest, most dramatic cheer roared from the crowd when Barack Obama made his entrance. Despite the cold I was warmed by that moment, and I watched gleefully as Obama recited the oath of office, gave an eloquent speech, and left the Capitol to thunderous cheers, as the 44th president of the United States.

I will never regret going to inauguration. Nor will I ever forget it. Despite the massive crowds and difficulty leaving the Mall, people were cheerful. In a city infamous for one-upmanship and personal gain over communal growth, the happiness, love, and camaraderie amid the crowd was vibrant. My body was cold walking home, but my spirit was warmed, knowing that tomorrow, when the crowds had left, the scaffolding taken down, and life went back to normal, that feeling of optimism and hope within my community would remain. Now that is a good feeling.

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Inaugural Parade

The moment had come that I had been waiting for since I found out that I would be marching in the Inaugural Parade as a representative of AmeriCorps and AmeriCorps Alums. I was ready and dressed by 4:40 am. The line of cars waiting to enter the Shady Grove Metro station was crazy, so I decided to get off the bus and walk to the Metro instead of waiting on the bus to take me to the station. From there, it was off to Pentagon City where we were to meet for the parade.



Patricia, a VISTA at [Montgomery County Executive Office of Community Partnerships](#), is the one holding the flag.

Four hours later, I was riding on the AmeriCorps bus from Pentagon City down to the parade route. Armed with our cell phones but without a television on the bus, we shouted for joy at noon, knowing that power had been peacefully transferred from one administration to another. For one single moment in time, at 12:00 as I rode the bus from the Pentagon to the parade route in DC, I realized that our American history had been preparing us for this day. I immediately looked to my left, looking outward at the incoming throng of history right before my eyes. White, yellow, brown, red hats covered their heads as they push forward into history, leaving behind past things, welcoming the promise of freedom in a dawning of a new age signaled by the inauguration of Barack Obama.

While getting off the bus, I was welcomed by the cold winter wind hitting my face. I immediately put my foot warmers and hand warmers on. After all, we were told to be prepared to walk 3-4 miles for 3-4 hours, instead we stood in line for two hours and a half before the parade began. The reason for the delay was that Senator Kennedy had taken ill, delaying the President. In between jumping jacks and dancing to the tones of the marching bands, we waited in line while managing to stay warm. When the wait was over, I proudly lifted up my state of Maryland's flag along with the other flag and banner carriers into history.

To read and see more of Patricia's experience, visit her blog at <http://paticiarogers.blogspot.com/>.

To see AmeriCorps Alums in the parade, go [here](#).

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Frequently Asked Questions:

Q: What is the Viewfinder?

A: VISTA means view-looking out on a broad expanse. The viewfinder, a toy that all generations of VISTAs recognize, was a kind of binocular that focused on points of interest, highlights, and snapshots in living color. The VISTA Viewfinder surveys in the landscape and zeroes in on service.

Q. Why the Viewfinder?

A. Here's your direct link to connecting with other VISTAs, learning what they are doing, and helping to spread the message of VISTA and national service!

Q. How can I contribute?

A. Have a story to tell? Submission ideas? Contact vistaoutreach@cns.gov. Use the Viewfinder to highlight your VISTA service and share your experiences with others across the country!

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